



In Denmark, as elsewhere in Western Europe, the children of immigrants and refugees typically experience higher dropout rates and lower levels of academic achievement than their Danish peers. Such inequities persist into adulthood, as foreigners face higher levels of unemployment, chronic underemployment, and sometimes overt discrimination in the workplace.

In Roskilde, a city located 30 kilometers west of Copenhagen, the local government launched a program aimed at stemming this trend. I had the opportunity to conduct a case study during the initial years (1997–2000) of this program, designed to enhance the school-readiness of

ethnic minority preschool children in Roskilde (Virtue 2002). My study, which was supported by a doctoral scholarship from the Kappa Delta Pi Educational Foundation, offers valuable lessons regarding the design and implementation of programs that aim to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

The Setting

Roskilde is a city of 51,770. In 1998, among those living in Roskilde were 2,656 foreign citizens and asylum-seekers, who constituted about 5 percent of the total population. The pattern of migration to Roskilde closely mirrored the pattern elsewhere in Denmark. Laborers, primarily from

Turkey and Yugoslavia, migrated to the cities in the 1960s and early 1970s to meet the swelling demand for industrial workers. Other migrants—notably those from Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia—traveled to Roskilde as refugees in the 1980s and 1990s.

The Integration Project

In December 1996, the municipal council in Roskilde decided to address

David C. Virtue is an Assistant Professor in Instruction and Teacher Education at the University of South Carolina. His research interests include anthropology of education, comparative and international education, and middle level social studies.

issues involving the education of children from non-Danish-speaking homes in the local schools. The official term for such children in Denmark is *tosprogede*, or “bilinguals” (Danish Ministry of Education 1996). In 1997, there were 573 bilingual students from more than 20 countries in the schools in Roskilde (Danish Ministry of Refugees 2002).

The council unanimously decided to initiate a three-year project that involved enhancing the school-readiness of bilingual children through the preschool centers in Roskilde. The project (Roskilde Børne-og Kultur Forvaltningen [BKF] 1997), launched under the theme *Tal Dansk* (Speak Danish), had three basic goals:

1. Bilingual children starting in kindergarten classes will be able to speak Danish at the same level as their Danish peers.
2. Parents of bilingual children must be encouraged to accept placement offers to enroll their children, primarily from the age of 2-1/2 years, in preschool institutions.
3. Bilingual parents must be familiar with the Danish way of child rearing, the responsibilities of parents, and what schools expect of parents and children.

The team assembled to implement the project consisted of an integration coordinator, a caseworker, and four bicultural integration workers. The integration team delivered five types of services to the program targets: casework that involved encouraging parents of bilingual children to use preschool centers and after-school programs; training and professional development of preschool staff members; parent education; facilitation and mediation of interaction among parents, preschool staff members, and children; and social and linguistic stimulation activities with bilingual children.

The Roskilde Integration Project was given three years to fulfill its mandate to work with bilingual children and their families as specified in the project goals. During the first year and a half, the integration team concentrated on encouraging immigrant parents to enroll their children in preschools. None of the 215 children in this target group were enrolled in preschools, so the caseworker visited the homes of bilingual families with preschool-age children and spoke with community leaders about the availability of preschool services for children, while the integration workers worked closely with the preschools as they welcomed the new children and their parents to their institutions.

By December 1999, all the children in the target group were enrolled in preschools. As a result of this success, the integration team expanded the scope of its work to include encouraging parents to place their school-age children in after-school organizations that provided extended-day play and enrichment. The integration team also increased its level of cooperation with the primary schools.

Because staff members in the preschools had no prior experience working with non-Danish speaking children, the integration team organized and led numerous courses and seminars to enhance their qualifications. Staff development and training was systematized in 1999 when the integration coordinator—with the cooperation of the Labor Department, the teachers’ union, and the preschools—organized the Education and Rotation Project. This project was designed to train all staff members in the 20 preschools with bilingual children between November 1999 and September 2000. Prior to the intensive four-week training course, a corps of 20 substitutes, eight of whom were bicultural, were trained

to take the place of preschool staff members while they participated in the program.

A Cultural Process

Implementing the Integration Project involved more than the mere technical aspects of delivering educational services and related support. Essentially, the implementation also was an ongoing cultural process. The most pervasive example of the Integration Project as a cultural system was in the team’s use of language and other symbolic expressions to transform the way people thought, felt, and spoke about integration.

The prevailing view of integration, as embedded in the initial theme and goals of the project, was that integration could be equated with language acquisition. The process was assimilationist, unidirectional, and language-based. In contrast, integration team members held a view of integration that involved more than just language acquisition. In their view, integration was a process of mutual adaptation involving “respectful dialogue” among adults, collaboration and cooperation across ethnic lines, and a multicultural vision for society. Members of the team, particularly the integration coordinator, possessed the political skill and resources to define and build consensus around that vision. They aimed to construct meanings—signified by terms such as *integration*, *culture*, *bilingual*, and *multicultural*—that would be shared by all stakeholders.

As the project developed, the integration team shifted the focus from a narrow effort to enhance the Danish language competence of bilingual children, as defined by the goals they received from the local politicians, to a much more broadly defined effort that encompassed educating parents, developing and training preschool staff members, increasing the participation of bilingual children in after-school

clubs, promoting mother tongue development and maintenance, and transforming the relationship between ethnic minority families and the larger society.

These new goals were not formally written in any document, but rather were codified in the activities of and language used by the integration team. For example, they were evident in the increased attention to the qualifications of preschool staff members to work with bilingual children, at first through ad hoc courses and seminars and later through *Projekt Vintergækker* (a winter project named for a white flower that blooms during that season) and the more formal Education and Rotation Project described earlier. The new goals also were evident in the positive attention given to the role of a child's first language in the integration process, as expressed in the status reports prepared for the local politicians and bureaucrats (Roskilde BKF 1997; 1999).

Linking Communities

The process of implementing the Roskilde Integration Project involved linking a community of practice—consisting of the integration team, educators, and other professionals—with the immigrant community. A *community of practice* is a network of individuals who are bound together by their common pursuit of solutions to a common set of problems (Wenger 1998; 2000). In the Roskilde case, the community of practice included those stakeholders who were actively engaged in addressing integration issues, including the integration team, some local politicians, preschool workers who involved themselves in work with bilingual children, and parents and members of the community who became involved in Integration Project activities.

Organizations build social learning systems which consist of a variety of communities of practice that interact

and are integrated through certain “boundary processes” (Wenger 2000, 10). One of these processes is “reculturing,” through which a professional community that shares common values, beliefs, and norms is developed (Fullan 2001). This process was evident in the Roskilde case as the

programs for language minority immigrant and refugee students may be designed to work *with* rather than *against* these processes. In this case, the implementation process was structured in a way that contributed to unintended positive outcomes, such as increased parent involvement

“The process of implementing the Roskilde Integration Project involved linking a community of practice.”

integration team forged links with the staff members in daycare institutions, other professionals who worked with preschool children (i.e., nurses, psychologists, and speech and hearing pathologists), and other members of the community.

As the integration team helped to develop a community of practice, team members also worked to extend the boundaries of the community of practice to include resources embedded in the community of immigrants and refugees. Team members valued these resources as “community funds of knowledge” (Moll et al. 1992). They tried to accomplish this goal by disseminating information to the parents in their native languages and by creating opportunities for them to voice their concerns, ask questions, and propose ideas.

Closing Thoughts

My case study of the Roskilde Integration Project illustrated the complexity of implementing programs that meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. The study revealed underlying processes of learning, culturing, and political activity within the implementation process, and demonstrated how

and changed attitudes toward marginalized minority groups on the part of preschool staff members, local politicians, and Danish parents. ■

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